

Mayor's Column for February 24, 2010 Review

In my last mayor's column I wrote about the abundance of social capital in Evansville. I referenced Harvard professor Robert Putnam's belief that strong intertwined networks of people are the building blocks of effective communities. I have been reading "Better Together", co-authored by Putnam and Lewis Feldstein, a collection of case studies of effective communities.

There is a companion website at www.bettertogether.org. It includes a list of nearly 150 things you can do to build social capital. Putnam and Feldstein believe "hundreds of little and big actions we take every day" increase social capital. Here are a dozen assorted items from the list: mentor someone; exercise together or take walks with friends or family; give to your local food bank; organize a town-wide yard sale; volunteer at your neighborhood school; gather a group to clean up a local park or cemetery; attend Memorial Day parades and express appreciation for others; plan a reunion of family, friends, or those with whom you had a special connection; audition for community theater or volunteer to usher; sit on your stoop [front porch]; collect oral histories from older town residents; and organize or participate in a sports league. All of these activities, as well as many, many other listed items, occur in Evansville.

I am struck by the numerous activities involving "intertwined networks" that occur regularly in Evansville. Here are current examples of collaborative work.

SOLE, a group of citizens dedicated to Lake Leota restoration, continues to work toward the goal of re-establishing a great fishing environment in our lake. Working with the DNR and the City Park Board, SOLE is sinking some brush piles into the lake to make fish habitat. The brush piles currently on the lake will sink when the ice melts this spring.

The Lions Club is in discussion with the Park Board about possible community improvement projects. The Lions will work with the Boy Scouts at the Pancake Breakfast that will be held in conjunction with the FFA Alumni Farm Toy Show in March. All three groups undertake projects that improve and benefit our community.

The well-attended Chocolate Extravaganza held earlier this month was sponsored by the Evansville Fund, our community foundation. The Evansville Fund has provided grants to numerous organizations and projects that enhance our community.

Last weekend Evansville Community Partnership held the tenth annual Chili Cook-Off. Assisted by the Evansville Youth Center, Matthias James Pottery, and other businesses, the Cook-Off is a terrific family-friendly event that supports the work of ECP, as well as being an auxiliary fundraiser for Youth Center programming. ECP has a mission of building community, working on community events throughout the year.

Representatives from several community groups recently participated in a strategic planning session of the Evansville Grove Society. The Society intends to develop a plan for active promotion of Evansville's local history.

Planning is well underway for the 2010 Fourth of July celebration. The Fourth of July Committee, ECP, and business and citizen volunteers will make this year's hometown celebration memorable.

Many school district teachers, the Evansville Water & Light Department, and ECP have been working on plans for the 2010 Energy Fair. Evansville families enjoy the many activities and exhibits while increasing their environmental knowledge.

I recently attended an exploratory meeting for establishment of a local Timebank. ECP will spearhead the volunteer program that builds relationships within the community while increasing local volunteer activity. Watch for more information on this likely new community asset.

The Chamber of Commerce will sponsor the annual Easter Egg Hunt in early spring. Our businesses are strong supporters of the Week of the Young Child activities.

The Chamber and ECP are already planning the Harvest Windmill Festival with its Buy Local theme. A reprise of Windmills on Parade along Main Street is in the plans.

The Chamber of Commerce and City have worked on development of a new Evansville brochure that is designed by a local business, ModelUNO Photography. ECP will spearhead the Summer Kick-Off and Discover Wisconsin Premiere Party, with assistance by the Chamber, City and citizen volunteers. A Discover Wisconsin design committee that includes Chamber, City, ECP and citizen representatives is working on program outline review, script development, and final film review. The Chamber of Commerce will host and maintain our visitors' website, in association with Discover Wisconsin marketing activities.

The Woodchucks continue to work with the school district on expanding their mentoring program. The Grove Society has been assisted by the Woodchucks in the restoration of the Baker Office Building.

Eager Free Public Library is providing English as a Second Language Classes to our citizens. The Library sponsors an annual local art exhibition and a Hispanic Heritage Festival.

The Ecumenical Care Closet and Food Pantry receive support from our local church congregations. The Boy Scouts and Girl Scouts undertake food drives to add supplies to the Food Pantry.

Friends, family, and a compassionate community plan open houses, rallies, fundraisers, and memorials for those we care about. I am gratified by the community support of our friends and neighbors in need.

Community Center planning continues with the efforts of many individuals and organizations. Strong community support will make Creekside Place an important source for future community collaborations and activities.

I can continue on with this list. The collaborations in Evansville are numerous and knit us tightly together; we are a strong, effective community. If we continue to grow our social capital and increase our collaborations and networks of networks, our future achievements will be remarkable.

Discover Wisconsin Update

The first air date of the Evansville episode of Discover Wisconsin is Saturday, June 12, 2010, at 6:30 p.m. on WKOW, channel 27, in our viewing area. Evansville is now listed as a destination city on the Discover Wisconsin website at discoverwisconsin.com.

The new Evansville brochure that will be used for Discover Wisconsin displays at trade shows, as well as for local marketing use, will be delivered in a few days.

Mark your calendars for Thursday evening, June 10. A family-friendly Summer Kick-Off Party and Discover Wisconsin Premiere will be held under a tent at Lake Leota. Evansville will celebrate the end of the school year with a party that includes a big-top theater complete with popcorn and treats, showing cartoons and viewing the premiere of our Discover Wisconsin episode. Watch for further details as planning is completed for this new summer event!

Community Announcements

The Wisconsin Farm Center of the Department of Agriculture, Trade & Consumer Protection has launched a new program called Future Fields. Future Fields can help if you are looking for supplemental income from off-farm employment, seeking a career after farming, or need to figure out what to do. A program staff member who is a former or current farmer will meet with you one-on-one in your home to determine your specific needs and help you develop an action plan. They will also assist you in finding the available resources to update your job skills, improve your interviewing techniques, create a resume, complete a job application, start a small business, or other specific needs.

Future Fields is funded through a Workforce Innovation in Regional Economic Development (WIRED) grant. The program is a collaborative effort of the Southwest Wisconsin Workforce Development Board, Workforce Development Board South Central Wisconsin, the Wired Initiative and the Wisconsin Farm Center.

If you are interested in Future Fields, contact Program Coordinator Mike Exum toll-free at 1-800-942-2474 or e-mail Michael.Exum@Wisconsin.gov. Brochures on the Future Fields program are available at City Hall and Eager Free Public Library.

The food pantry at the Care Closet can use donations of basic personal supplies, such as shampoo, bar soap, toothbrushes and toothpaste, toilet paper, Kleenex, etc.

The FFA Alumni Farm Toy Show and Lions Pancake Breakfast will be held on Sunday, March 7, 2010 at Theodore Robinson Intermediate School.

Flat Stanley, Evansville student Austin C.'s friend, has arrived at our home. Stanley will be mayor-in-training for a few weeks.

Community Thanks

Evansville thanks Andy Peart, American Family Insurance, for his community commitment and support over the past years. Andy has been a strong sponsor of Evansville Home Talent Baseball and served on the board of the Evansville Chamber of Commerce. Best wishes, Andy!

Our community is proud of the efforts of our students to collect aid for Haiti. Haitian citizens have dire needs; thank you, students, for your caring projects.